MIRANDA

Georgia Wood Pangborn

"WELL, then," said my father, "I'll give you September to do it in. You can have the cottage and its poetic view of the ocean. Maria and Jack will wait on you—unless you prefer to cook for yourself." I didn't. "I'll give you all of September to write your play. A whole month. If you make good I've nothing to say. Go ahead and be another Shakespeare; but if the egg you want to lay so badly is addled, after all, I'll see you at my office on the first of October. Wholesale groceries ain't half bad," he said, rather wistfully. "I've even thought if I'd been in the writing line myself, I could 'a' smelt out romance on my wharves when the tea and coffee are unloading. Did you ever think," he asked hopefully, "of writing advertisements?"

I admitted I hadn't.

"Well, I don't say I don't wish you luck, and I don't say *as* I do. A man rather likes to have his son in his own business, providing it's good and respectable."

"Now, my dear," mother said, lingering, as usual, for a last word behind his back, "you just go ahead and don't mind father. He's terribly proud of your education; but, literature—well, it don't seem practical. He thinks you'll wear long hair and strike attitudes like that softy who was hanging around Millie this summer."

"Le Vallissime!"

"Well, he's kind of famous, ain't he?"

"I suppose he is. Sorry dad thinks I've got the makings of that sort."

"Well, don't you fret. Mother understands. And I bet it'll run on Broadway three hundred nights in the year."

And so they went—bless their dear hearts!—leaving me as they had made me, and as they were proud of having made me.

So I have a month in which to prove that I can do something better—if it *is* better—than my father did. And here I sit in a "magic casement opened on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn," and try to think in meters and epigrams while the leaves of the calendar fall like the autumn leaves.

I tried to make him see that a month was a short time, but I couldn't. He's a business man, and time is money. Of course I can't do it; but I was glad of the respite of a month before settling down to groceries for the rest of my life. And then—inspiration *might* come. Wasn't it in about three days that Stephen Crane wrote the "Red Badge of Courage"? And then "Rasselas"; that was a literary Marathon, too. It's been done.

Our bluff goes down at an angle of forty-five degrees for seventy feet. The sea looks bigger when you're up so high. When there's a storm it's bully. I see that the last three days have moved the wreck again. It's on our beach now; a nice long bottom of a ship, big enough to take the place of a board walk at low tide. We've played it was a board walk

all summer. Now one cottage has had it, and now another, as the tides and storms moved it around the Sound. I suppose the winter storms will either bury it high in the sand or take it out to sea again.

There's that girl again!

I wonder if she knows the tide is about to turn? Well, I'm not going down those eighty odd steps to tell her so; but if she doesn't come in pretty soon from the far end of that nice board walk, it's little Johnny to the rescue. She acts rather as if she were a poet or something, too. But even a cat ought to feel poetic and scary at such a sea as that—black and purple waves, black and purple clouds, with a glare of pink coming through like burning Walhalla. And a good surf running. I don't think I ever saw the sea so black. And the storm has brought in that great drift of seaweed again. If she thinks she's going to walk to town along the beach, she's going to have trouble. It's all in a slushy mess as high as her head.

Odd how, when a place is as deserted as this, the only people who are left seem to be on deck all the time. If I go to the post office she's there. If I ride over the moors, she's walking over them. If I walk along the beach, there she is picking up shells; and now if I look out of the window, there she is standing on my wreck and meditating. It's like the old nursery game: "Just like me." *I* don't mind; but I can see she is getting cross about it. You don't suppose she thinks I do it on purpose?

I can't think why we haven't met this summer. I thought I knew everybody. And I can't make out which cottage she comes from. Wonder if she's rusticating, too? No, we haven't met this summer; but I could swear we've met *somewhere*. Could I have danced with her and forgotten it? That seems hardly possible. Or else—probably I've just seen her in a crowd; sat opposite her on the elevated; something like that. Or—could it be the stage? It might be; there's such a lot of stage people here, only I thought this was the time for rehearsals. However, if she stays out on the end of that wreck about ten minutes more, I shall find out.

Well—everybody's gone again. No, not everybody. I wonder why young Mr. Burke stays on? It makes me so cross to meet him riding around that way, and looking as if he had everything in the wide world a human being could possibly wish for. The creak of his saddle leather as he goes by, and the shine of his stirrups, and the lovely soft browns and grays of his riding suit, are things that no wise girl should think about.

I don't mind people of that sort so much when they're in a crowd. Then I'm just like the other islanders; all I care about is to make money out of them. But this lone, lorn young Lothario stirs my imagination, and makes me remember that, after all, I'm young, and that I want—oh, I do want pretty things. *I* want to ride over the moors instead of walking all the time. I want a horse just like his, and to go riding away—away. A boat isn't the same. And—yes—I'd like him to come along. I think I'd be more fun than that piggy-eyed girl he has been about with all summer.

Poor daddy and his marines! I suppose he hasn't the least idea that it's my silly work that pays the bills. Well, that's what it is to be a genius. But if he had known that I was a waitress at the hotel last summer—what would he have said to that, I wonder!

Oh, dear! I wonder if I could paint real marines like daddy's, only—salable. Here's the ocean. Here am I. I have paints, and daddy could give me criticisms if he would.

The sea is lovely—if one weren't so young and didn't want something else so badly. I don't exactly know what; but it seems to be expressed by Mr. Burke's creaking saddle, and shiny stirrups, and pretty clothes as he goes by and leaves me in a sand cloud. I don't mean I want *him*—gracious, no! But he's a sort of symbol.

This old wreck is nice. I'll make some post cards of it. They like wrecks.

I suppose they don't realize what wrecks mean. They've never seen new wreckage come in. If they had they wouldn't want 'em on post cards. Oh, dear me, what a big, black ocean it is! I don't know if I hate or love it. A whole ocean between me and the rest of the world! But if I could paint it —could I build a raft of my sketches to take me across—only daddy would have to come, too, and I suppose he wouldn't want to.

There, the tide is turning. I heard it slap. And now, what a bore, I've got to wade back, and it's cold. Well, here goes for shoes and stockings; and I hope *this* time the ever-present Mr. Burke is *not* strolling along the beach.

Well, by the genius of all that's inopportune, there he is! Just coming down his own bluff stairs. Now what? I can't take off my shoes and stockings, and in a few minutes my wreck will be awash. Oh, well, I'll wait until he gets by, and swim, but—I wish it weren't so cold.

"If I had an aëroplane, I'd sail down from the bluff and pick you up as neatly as a hawk picks up a chicken, and sail back with you, and neither of us would wet a feather. Not having one, I'm afraid you must allow me to wade out to you and carry you back. It's a way tides have—this."

"Thank you so much, but I generally use aëroplanes. Couldn't you telephone for one?"

"I'll be sure to have one on hand next time; but that last wave wet your shoes. I fancy we'd better not wait. Now, if you'll permit me. There! Didn't I do it nicely?"

"I—I'm very grateful, indeed; but I'm afraid you're terribly wet yourself. It was outrageously careless of me."

"Is this the sixth or seventh time we've met to-day?"

"Seventh. No—sixth. I saw you once when you didn't see me. Does that count? That would make seven."

"Eight, then; because I saw you once when you didn't see me. I was up in my magic casement trying to concentrate, and you went by in a rowboat. I recognized you without the glasses. Then I used them, and saw that your lips were moving. I've been wondering what poem you were reciting out there all to yourself. It was choppier than I'd have cared to row about in."

"Reciting? Oh!

"Earth cannot answer, nor the seas that mourn
In flowing purple of their lord forlorn.

Would you call it so choppy? But I'm used to rowing."

"Do you often spend the summers here?"

"I always do."

"Do you often stay as late as this?"

"Always."

"Really? I never have before. People run away from the autumn storms. Hereafter I'm going to stay for them. They're the best part of it."

"I'm awfully grateful; but I must go, and—no—you mustn't walk back with me—really—for several reasons. One is you're soaked, and it's not hygienic to stay in wet clothes."

"And the other?"

"Please don't make me say anything nasty."

"I don't think you could."

"Well, then, saving a person's life—or saving one from a wetting, doesn't *quite* take the place of an introduction, does it?"

"Madam, I don't know your name, but for the past week we've been walking over each other at every fence corner; and, except for the venerable native shellbacks, I really believe we're the only two people on the island. We are marooned here together. I don't know what your crime was; but mine was to dream a dream; and I am expiating it by realizing that it *is* a dream. I have three weeks more to realize it in, and then—I go back to sand the sugar and thin the coffee with chicory forevermore. But to go back. My name is Burke. My father is McNab, Burke & Co. There isn't any McNab. I finished at Yale this spring, and I'm up here to think it over. I am respectable. I am—I *am*. And if it hadn't been for me—— Do you see that very curly

black shadow down there, just this side the wreck—somewhere between three and fifty feet long? See how fast he wiggles? He flapped around my ankles when I waded in. If you had waded out, he'd have flapped around *your* ankles. Maybe I didn't save your life; but I saved you from stepping on an eel. Please, mayn't we be acquainted?"

"Seems to me we're getting on pretty well without being acquainted."

"Why, you know it's like when they agree 'Whereas, by the action of the other fellow a state of war exists——' See? You don't have to declare war in order to have war, and you don't have to be introduced in order to be acquainted. Now, then! Whereas, thanks to the wreck and the eels we are acquainted. What did you say your name was?"

"Jane Doe."

"That's not fair. However—well, if I go back now for dry duds, will you please bow to-morrow morning at the post office, and all the other times we're sure to meet?"

"If I can remember."

"Thank you so much."

Now she's gone. I'm going to do my heroine all over again. "Jane Doe." Iphigenia, Helen—why, I hadn't realized she was a beauty. Perhaps it was the way the wind took her hair. And then she was blushing so. I hope I wasn't too—— But she didn't seem angry. I'm not sure she wasn't pleased. But what can a girl like *that* be doing up here all alone at this time of year? Who can she be? What a manner she has—makes one feel coarse-fibered and clumsy. I seem to see her in a court train and a tiara. Did she look a little scornful when I mentioned the grocery business?

"Good morning, Mr. Burke."

"Good morning, Miss Doe. D'you mind if I get down?"

"You don't seem to wait for answers to your questions. I think I *do* mind your getting down. Please mount and go on with your ride."

"But I'd rather not. Aren't we gloriously sensible to stop for September? I think I never saw such a morning. There was still quite a bit of surf at sunrise. Do you swim?"

"A little."

"Please, why didn't we meet this summer, or last summer, or summer before that? And what is your real name, and which is your cottage? I beg your pardon—I—have I been rude? Did I say something—— But—oh, *please*—but you mustn't! What a brute I must have been, yet I can't for the life of me think how——"

"You haven't been a brute at all. Don't you know that girls often cry without any reason? Are you quite sure you don't remember my face? Quite—quite sure? See here—if I pin my handkerchief—so—and so—and put it on my head—so. Now pretend I have an apron on—'Clam chowder or consommé, sir?' *Now* have you ever seen me before? And—and—*now* will you please get on your horse, sir, and ride away, sir, and keep to your end of the island, sir, and I'll keep to mine. It's a shame to stand there and watch me cry—go away. Ah! I thought you were a—gentleman. But it seems not. I suppose, though, you always kiss the maids."

"I couldn't help it. It wasn't an insult. It was—I don't know what it was, but not that. Yes, I remember you. What does it mean? You live here all the year around, all the long winter here? You see the winter storms and wrecks. These are *your* moors? I might have guessed. There was an eldritch kind of mystery about you. So *that* was it! The sea in your eyes and the wind in your hair! Have I really made you so angry? But please don't look like that, because I'm not going to say—or I'll try not to say—what you don't want to hear."

"This is my house, Mr. Burke. It is so little that you didn't even realize it was a house, did you? But that is the way fishermen have to build on account of the winter winds. The big cottages that are shut up all winter don't mind; but on the moors in winter we have to be low and little. Still, we are amazing-

ly comfortable—my father and I. He has a good north light for his painting. We have two rooms and a little loft. You will have read poems about driftwood fires; they *are* cozy. And one can gather quite a bit for one's self, though it's heavier than you'd think when it's loggy with sea water. These little gray nubbins of houses are really the aristocracy of the island. Ours is a hundred and fifty years old, they say; and every stick of it has been to sea—perhaps around the world. When the wind is right, you can hear the ghosts of drowned sailors calling and shouting among the planks of what used to be their ship."

"Miranda!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, I just happened to think where you belonged—in literature."

"Oddly enough it *is* my name. My father is—an educated man, you see, and something of a Prospero. Yes; he named me Miranda. It used to worry me; but I don't mind now."

"Admired Miranda——"

"I'd rather you wouldn't be silly. I never thought much of Ferdinand, anyhow. My last name is Smith. My father paints marines. He paints very well, too. But one may be a very great painter and a noble man, and nobody but one's daughter be the wiser. He didn't know that I waited at the hotel. Now I'm going in. Good-by—and, if you please, sir, it *is* good-by. I shall forget to bow next time."

"That's right—shut the door in my face. But it's *not* good-by. Not if I fight it out here all winter. It's not good-by."

"But I told you yesterday afternoon that we were not going to speak any more."

"Speaking as a business man—and I should have something of barter in my blood, being the only son of McNab, Burke & Co.; and there isn't any McNab—it takes two to make a bargain. *I* didn't agree that we weren't to speak. If you hadn't shut the door in my face, and turned the key, you'd have heard me not agreeing. I had thoughts of the window. But not knowing just how muscular a man your father might be, or whether his pistol was loaded, I thought I'd take the chances on your coming out again some time."

"I think you are very unkind, and I think you are not what I supposed a—gentleman—would be like. But so far my father is the only gentleman I know much about. And still I remember when you and your mother dined at the hotel for a while, I thought—I didn't mind taking tips from you quite as much as from some of the others. Now you make me wish I had all that money—it came to three dollars—to give back to you."

"It's you who are unkind. Don't you know—can't you see——"

"I rather think I don't want to know. We have nothing in common. Our lives are as far apart as if—as if I were an Eskimo. If you trouble me any more, I shall go into the house and stay there while you're on the island."

"Why—then—out with it! I stayed up here to dream of a misty heroine creature, and put her on paper, and get famous over her so that I needn't mix up with raisins and prunes for the rest of my life; and I've found a woman of flesh and blood instead. And the dream's all gone; every bit of it. And I want just you—*you* forever. I want to go back into the business and make it hum, so that I can lay all the pretty things in the world at your feet. I know it hasn't been long, but—but—I can't begin to tell you how real it is. Marry me now, and I'll take you back to father, and say: 'I've got it—this was what I stayed up there for, though I didn't know what it was at first. And now put me in harness, and make a man of me as much like yourself as ever you can, so that I can make her as happy as you've made my mother.'"

"I—I—I thank you, Mr. Burke. You have done me a great honor. I shall be better and happier for it all my life. I'm sorry I must give you pain, yet I must say no. And now—please let me go in. And I fancy it would be better for both of us if you go back to New York now."

"Then—is there some one else? I'm afraid I must insist on your telling me that. Is there somebody else? Conceited ass that I am, I never dreamed of that! You—you so filled the world—you were the only woman in it, and so I supposed I was the only man. You haven't said yet, though, that there *is* somebody else. It's the only reason that will make me go. For if it is just that you don't love me—I'd understand I hadn't given you time, and I know I could *make* you care. So is it any one else?"

"Yes—oh, *yes*. Please go."

"Why—then—— Good-by.

"I've come back to say one thing more. You mustn't feel unhappy about it, you know. It hurts—I can't tell you how it hurts—but I'm not going to say, as a fellow sometimes does, that you've spoiled my life. I won't let it do that. I'll try—to be more of a man instead of less. And now I'll go. But, oh—the sea in your eyes and the sun in your hair. He won't mind if I kiss your hand—so. There, I've done it, anyway. Good-by."

Now he is gone. "Any one else!" An old, old, sorrowful man, who has nothing in all the world but me. Oh, you are young, my love, and there will be other women in the world with eyes and hair. May you find one that will be good to you. She mustn't be selfish and horrid. I'll find out, and if she is, I'll kill her, I think. I want you to be happy, to remember me only a little. Just that there was a girl who stood on a wreck too long, and you carried her ashore. And she married somebody, you'll think. You won't know that she belonged to an old man who had nobody else. I suppose this is what is meant by hearts breaking. I—don't wonder they call it that.

"Something of a blow, Cap'n Eli."

"Eh? Blow and snow—yep. The boat had a great time, they say, just out beyond the Rip. Just thirty days' mail aboard her—just only thirty days. Been to the post office yet, judge? It's a sight. Hull town's there."

"Cap'n, you and I don't get a letter once in a dog's age. What's thirty days' delay in the mails to us? We're past the age of letters. How old are you?"

"Waal, now, you're askin' me questions. My first voyage around the Horn was in fifty-one, nigh about sixty years ago—an' I was a married man then—three little shavers I left behind me, and one came soon after I went. By George, he was six years old when I came back!"

"Going on ninety, then, cap'n. I'm a mere boy to you. I'm only seventy-nine. Great climate, eh? They say of us that we islanders never die—just dry up and blow away. Old leaves like you'n me would better look out in a gale like this, or we'll go flapping out to sea like yesterday's newspaper. By George, this *is* fierce! Let's run up on the steps of the Burke cottage. It'll be some shelter. I don't see how these big shingle palaces stand it on these bluffs all winter. I expect any morning to find 'em blown over like a pack of cards. Hello! Who's this? Why, my dear, you oughtn't to be abroad in such a gale. Don't you know you're in danger of being turned into a sea gull? Must watch the waves, must you? Well, this is a good place for it, but stand close between two steady old shellbacks while you do it; and hold on tight or the wind'll get a purchase on that hair of yours and carry you right out to the mermaids. My dear, I've had it in mind to drop in on you since—your father's death. But I'm old, and haven't been over and above lively of late. He was of us, and yet not of us. I remember when he came to the island with you. A great pair you were. Prospero and Miranda. Miranda must have been about two years old; and never the one without the other. But he didn't care much for us islanders; it was the sea he wanted. I'm afraid we didn't understand him. We thought him haughty; but I've suspected he may have been shy and melancholy instead. Was it that?"

"I hardly know. We were very happy together."

"And now—what will you do?"

"Domestic service. What else?"

"What, really? Now, that's too bad—but it's sensible. Yes, that's certainly sensible. Yes, sir. Well, sir, I'll go farther—it's thoroughbred. Hello—more oilskins! This porch is getting popular. Why, it's young Burke! Welcome to your hospitable roof, young man. I wouldn't spend the night under it for any money. What you doing so far from your right little tight little city? Our summer friends don't generally remember us in December. Don't run out into the storm that way, my dear. I want to talk more to you. I wanted to say—— That's right, young man, catch her! Easy does it—so. *What* d'you think of that, cap'n? And they've gone to the porch of the next house, though it's farther than 'twould have been to come back here. Complimentary to us. We aren't good enough for 'em. Well, sir, it's fine to be young, yet I wouldn't have it to do over again. It's pretty to watch, love-making is; but—well—I don't know—it's the after years that count. It's the gray-headed wife—yes, sir—it's the wife that's borne your children and been patient with your temper."

"What made you come back?"

"I heard that your father was sick."

"He isn't sick any more."

"Do you mean——"

"He died about a week ago."

"Then I'm too late to help in any way. I don't know what to say. One's father is—well—there's nothing to say. I shouldn't want people to try to say things to me, I think. Do you mind my asking—shall you be married soon?"

"No."

"One reason I came. It occurred to me that possibly it was some sailor chap who had to be away, and so couldn't help you. I thought he must be a sailor, because I hadn't seen you going about with anybody during the summer. It made me rather wild to think of you shut up on the island here—with trouble. I told my mother. She said it was right to come. She said, too, that she'd be glad to have you come and stay with her the rest of the winter. I'm—I'm going to be away, you know, and mother's such a trump. She's the sort of woman that knows how to take the hurt out of things. I can't describe it. 'Tisn't religion exactly; but it's making you look beyond. She's a kind of clearing house for everybody's troubles. I'm going to be away, you see. I'm going to Egypt—for a year or two, at least, and so you could. Wouldn't you like to be married from our house?"

"Why are you going to Egypt? Is it a business trip?"

"Partly. A man is supposed to travel, don't you know—after he gets through college."

"But I thought you were going into the business right away?"

"Why, I couldn't seem to take hold. Hookworm, I guess. They had doctor fellows to look me over, and they said I needed change—like these used-up society women. Nothing really wrong, only no grip. It's a bore to disappoint your parents; but I dare say a year or two will fix me up."

"Do you think you may write?"

"I don't seem to care about it. I fancy, though, it may turn out that way. When you've *'geliebt und gelebet'* enough, literature comes out on you like a rash. But when you can do it, then you don't care a hang. Oh, I'll do something. A war would be rather bully. Maybe I'll be a 'soldier of fortune.'"

"War?"

"Not here. But South America gives a lot of chances. If it weren't for mother—still, a mother like mine wouldn't stand in the way of my going if she thought it was best for me. She never said a word when I smashed ankles and things at football."

"I thought you seemed about the perfection of health and energy last summer. I—am sorry you're not well."

"Last summer—that was about a thousand years ago, wasn't it? 'We live in thoughts, not years.' Are you going to accept my mother's invitation? I'd like to send her a wireless this afternoon. Please do. Sis is going to be married, and mother will be all alone unless you do."

"When my father was dying he talked about my mother. It must be wonderful to have a mother. I thought yours was very lovely. But I was thinking of going out to—— Wouldn't your mother like me for a maid? And I can cook. I must be independent."

"What! See here, who is this chap you're going to marry? Would he let you go into somebody else's kitchen? I want to see him."

"I don't think—in fact—I'm quite sure that I didn't say I was going to be married."

"What do you mean? *What* do you mean?"

"You asked if there was any one else. I couldn't leave my father, could I? He might have lived for years and years, and you'd have had to wait, for I couldn't have broken up the life he was used to. And you have been sick."

"Do you see those two old men over there on our veranda?"

"Judge Meacham and Cap'n Eli."

"They are a justice of the peace and a witness. No! I won't wait a day—not an hour. Oh, my dear, I've been as good as dead for more than two months, and now I'm alive. And you—you are —*you*, after all. Oh, damn the sailor I had imagined for you! And I tried to be so noble. And now I don't have to be any more, and we'll go home to mother and dad; and we'll have our house right next them; and I'll be a king of finance, and bring you a box of diamonds and chocolates every night when I come home from the office."

"I—I could nurse you. Are you so ill?"

"Ill? I? What do you mean? I'm the strongest man in the world. I *was ill*—sick to death, I thought, though I did try to take it like a man. The cure is the same as for the hurts of little children. Kiss me again, and I'll be well."